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SUBJECT: DRC ELECTIONS: AN INSIDE LOOK AT KINSHASA'S
VOTING COMPILATION CENTER

¶1. (U) Summary: Following the enormous logistical challenge of organizing the DRC's July 30 presidential and legislative elections comes an equally daunting task: the collection, compilation and verification of tens of millions of ballots from some 50,000 polling stations nationwide. In Kinshasa, the local compilation center -- which handles ballots from more than 8,500 individual polling sites -- was a scene of chaos and confusion in the days immediately following the election, with dazed Electoral Commission workers unable to process the truckloads of election materials arriving by the hour. The initial haphazard storage of ballots, tally sheets and other paperwork raised serious concerns among some international observer missions about the transparency and security of the vote-counting process. Nonetheless, poll workers in Kinshasa have since established a greater sense of order at the capital's compilation center, and are well on their way to meeting the August 20 deadline for announcing national provisional results for the presidential contest. End summary.

¶2. (U) PolOff visited Kinshasa's local ballot compilation center twice in the week following the July 30 election. Members of the International Committee to Accompany the Transition (CIAT) also visited the compilation center August ¶10. In two rented warehouses that still contain the remains of an old printing press, the Independent Electoral Commission (CEI) is storing and verifying voting material from more than 8,500 polling sites throughout the city. On the site itself, there are four compilation centers -- one for each of Kinshasa's four voting districts -- with two in each building, operating 24 hours a day, involving roughly 900 personnel. (Note: The Kinshasa center originally closed each day around 5pm, but officials extended working hours so as to speed up the compilation process. End note.) Throughout the rest of the DRC, another 58 local compilation centers are collecting material from the remaining 41,000 polling stations.

INITIAL CHAOS AND CONFUSION

¶3. (U) The first visit on August 1 revealed a serious lack of preparation, organization and security at the center. The site itself was well-guarded, with Congolese police posted at the main entrance checking credentials for all those wanting to enter. (Note: Only officially accredited election observers, political party witnesses, journalists and election workers have authorization to enter compilation centers. End note.) Inside the compound was a fire engine (the reliability of which was uncertain), more police guards,

and an armored personnel carrier with a platoon of MONUC peacekeepers standing watch.

14. (U) The rest of the compound, however, was a scene of chaos and confusion. Outside one building, envelopes containing the records of voting operations and tally sheets were strewn across the ground as CEI workers tried to put them in piles according to neighborhood or voting center. Nearby, stacks of marked and unmarked ballots (presidential and legislative) were spilling out of cardboard boxes and left unattended in the open air. In a breezeway between two out-buildings, election workers had filled the entire 50-yard passage more than six feet high with used ballot boxes, packages of marked and unmarked ballots, and other supplemental election materials. Throughout the site, used ballot boxes were sealed and stuffed full of (presumably) marked ballots for safeguarding, as poll workers at the voting sites themselves apparently had no other means of securely transporting ballots to the compilation center. CEI workers were also witnessed haphazardly throwing all kinds of election material -- mostly used and unused ballots -- into a room that was already piled up to the ceiling. On another side of the compound, pickup trucks arrived regularly to drop off more loads of material from yet more voting sites. CEI workers were busy throughout the compound trying to sort through tally sheets, ballots and other documents -- some of which were torn or damaged from sitting out in the open -- and deliver them to the appropriate destination or storage room. At the Kinshasa compilation center, though, "storage" meant little more than randomly tossing armloads of election material into a room. (Note: The August 2 fire that reportedly destroyed ballots and other material at a Kinshasa center, reftel, occurred at a local liaison office in the N'djili neighborhood of the city, not at the compilation

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center. End note.)

WHAT'S ACTUALLY BEING COUNTED

15. (U) It should be noted, however, that the ballots themselves do not actually have to be recounted at the compilation centers. At each of the 50,000 polling sites, poll workers were required to fill out two documents in quadruplicate at the end of vote counting: a record of the "minutes" detailing that site's voting operations, plus a tally sheet indicating the number of votes for each candidate. The minutes contain notes on the number of ballots delivered, those used and unused, as well as how many were declared void (for being improperly marked). The minutes also record as well any disagreements or challenges political party witnesses or observers had with the voting or counting process. These two documents are CEI officials at the compilation centers use to verify election results. Workers at the compilation centers are required only to retabulate the figures from the tally sheets to ensure the correct calculations were made. If the original poll workers made an error in adding up the votes, compilation center officials attach a new tally sheet to the original with the correct numbers. In such cases, the ballots themselves are not recounted. The only case in which the ballots would manually be recounted is if the minutes of the vote-counting process indicate some discrepancy with the final vote tally.

16. (U) Inside the compilation centers, where the actual verification and tabulation process takes place, operations were somewhat more orderly. The envelopes containing tally sheets were scattered across the floor, as several poll workers in each centers walked through the piles to sort them by voting district for later counting. Most CEI officials were occupied with just trying to manage the large volume of material arriving by the hour. Some data entry specialists -- whose job is to input the actual vote counts into the central computer and send them to CEI headquarters electronically --

were either sitting around with nothing to do or absent from their posts. While no one person at each compilation center appeared to be in overall command, workers were generally going about their business with an air of determination and purpose.

MARKED IMPROVEMENTS

17. (U) By the time of PolOff's second visit on August 4, the Kinshasa compilation centers had improved their operations markedly. While several stacks of voting material remained outside, everything was under protective cover and generally arranged neatly. Storage rooms -- including the aforementioned passageway between two buildings -- were, however, still filled to the rafters with boxes and boxes of material. Gone, though, were the endless piles of ballots and boxes that had littered the compound three days earlier. Police forces and MONUC peacekeepers were still on guard, as was the sole fire truck. In response to the original problems at the center, CEI President Abbe Apollinaire Malu Malu added more staff to assist in the counting process. International election observers said as well they have noticed "huge improvements" made by the CEI since the initial week of operations.

18. (U) CEI workers at the compilation center were by August 4 fully engaged in the work at hand. All four centers were full of officials sorting tally sheets and other documents, verifying and tabulating results, inputting data into the computers, and preparing duplicate copies of all materials for delivery to the Supreme Court (which will be the final arbiter of presidential and legislative election disputes) and CEI headquarters. In addition, the chief of each compilation center was present and overseeing operations, and took time to answer questions from various observers about the compilation process. All centers have election observers and party candidate representatives watching the operations. The centers themselves were generally well-lit and air-conditioned, with enough space for all officials to work freely and comfortably. The envelopes containing minutes and tally sheets were neatly stacked and organized by voting center on shelves throughout the room. By the time of the CIAT visit August 10, operations were proceeding smoothly in

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all four compilation centers. The head of one center did complain that his internet connection had been sporadic over the past few days, which had led to delays in transmitting results to the CEI. Electoral Commission officials, though, said they had not encountered any other major logistical difficulties apart from dealing with the overwhelming influx of materials arriving immediately after July 30.

POOR PLANNING AND OVERWHELMING VOLUME

19. (SBU) The initial difficulties at the Kinshasa compilation center can be traced to two primary factors. The first is the sheer number of ballots, tally sheets and other material that were delivered to this one location. As reported previously, the legislative ballots alone for districts in Kinshasa were two feet by three feet in size, and six pages long. Adding these ballots to the presidential ballots from more than 8,500 polling stations created a literal tsunami of paper descending on election workers in Kinshasa. At compilation centers in the rest of the country, such problems have not arisen because the amount of material to be processed is nowhere near as large as in Kinshasa. Secondly, the CEI did a poor job communicating to its officials in Kinshasa exactly how to deliver voting material to the compilation center. Consequently, some polling sites sent their ballots to a local liaison offices, while others sent theirs directly to the compilation center. Moreover, as Malu Malu has conceded,

the Electoral Commission did not have enough vehicles to collect material from throughout the city, thereby delaying delivery or forcing election workers to use other (less secure) means of transport. Overall, CEI officials have admitted the Commission's plans -- particularly in Kinshasa -- for collecting material after the vote were not well-developed or executed.

CONCERNS STILL LINGER

¶10. (U) These deficiencies in the vote compilation process -- especially on questions regarding the chain of custody -- have worried many international observation missions. Carter Center and European Union officials in particular have said they are satisfied with the way the CEI has responded to initial problems with ballot security, storage and counting operations, but still expressed concerns about the overall integrity of the process. Both missions, though, have kept election observers in the DRC and are continuing to monitor operations both in Kinshasa and the rest of the DRC. At the Kinshasa compilation center, Congolese observers and political party witnesses have been present to note any potential irregularities. Compilation center officials told the CIAT August 10 that between 75-80 percent of the Kinshasa ballots had been collected and verified at the four centers. They expected to complete the presidential race compilation by the end of the weekend, and would then start on the National Assembly results.

COMMENT: KINSHASA THE EXCEPTION

¶11. (SBU) Comment: The Kinshasa compilation center is more the exception than the rule in the DRC. Elsewhere in the country, compilation centers have not experienced similar scenes of general disorder. Given the complexity and enormity of Kinshasa's ballots and polling stations, the collection, storage and verification of material was bound to be difficult at best. Certainly the initial days of operations at the Kinshasa center did not give observers the sense that the electoral process at this critical period was well managed. CEI officials have brought matters under control and are still on target to meet the Commission's timeline of an August 20 announcement for provisional presidential results. As during the vote itself, CEI officials proved resilient and innovative in the face of logistical difficulties, finding inventive ways to meet the required demands. While not perfect, the Congolese system is working and slowly producing results. In addition, despite the disarray and confusion, there still do not appear to be any concerted efforts by election workers -- or others -- to manipulate the vote. End comment.
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